

FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union www.fbu.org.uk

April 2008

RDS EQUALITY

Legal battle against
discrimination
secures victory
See p 10

Justice for firefighter pensions

Judicial Review heard
as campaign continues
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Are you a parent?

How the Union can help
with work/life balance
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It grabs him

Rob Oliver on his
chosen sport **Page 20**



Pension battle continues



The battle for Justice on Firefighter Pensions continues. In March we were in the Royal Courts of Justice to attend a Judicial Review. This case was taken against the government (Department for Communities and Local Government – CLG) and the former employer the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority – LFEPA.

I am still staggered that this case has got as far as it has. Everyone in the fire and rescue service knows that the case has highlighted a massive injustice. It cannot be allowed to continue. Despite this the CLG and LFEPA continue to try to argue that their actions are justifiable and the guidance issued relating to pensions is correct.

Our case is very strong and I hope that we will achieve victory through this process. If we do not then we shall continue our fight for the appropriate amendments to the pension scheme which will provide adequate protection to our members.

Parliament was told by the minister that this situation was not the government's intention. If that really is the case then why has the government not already addressed the concerns we have raised. Once again, national politicians have demonstrated a remarkable lack of concern for the welfare of firefighters and their families.

During the past two months the President and I have attended meetings throughout the UK on this issue. I have not

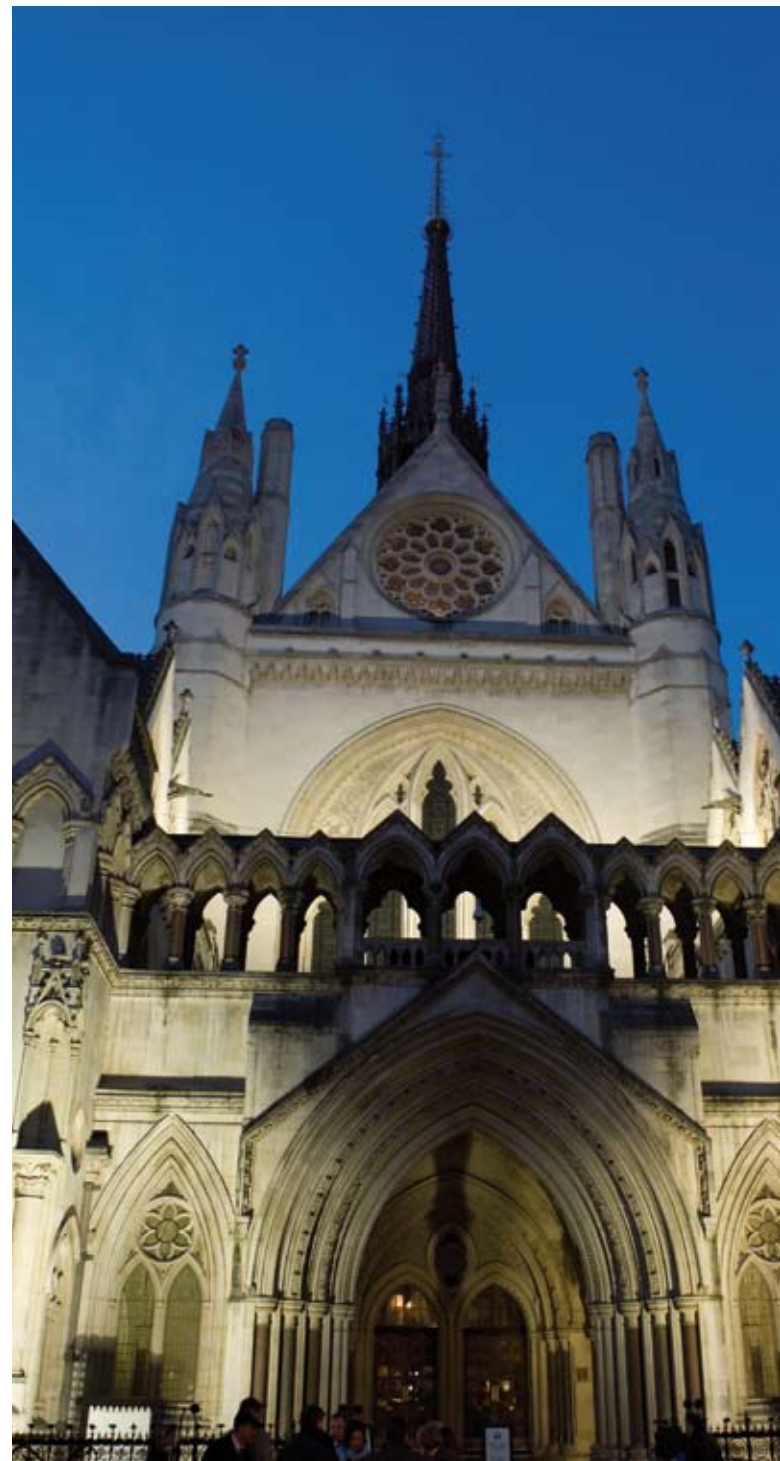
met a single FBU member who disagrees with our assessment of the situation or thinks our arguments are wrong. I have seen meeting after meeting declare a willingness to fight this if necessary. I hope that will not be necessary but urge all of you to continue to discuss this vital issue at local level.

Retained legal victory

You can read in this month's magazine about the marvellous victory the FBU has won for firefighters working the retained duty system. This has been a long battle and demonstrates to all concerned that the Fire Brigades Union is prepared to fight all the way to defend the rights of all members – regardless of what duty system they work. The truth is that no other organization could have devoted the time and resources to this legal battle. Remember that this involved a whole number of hearings, including at the House of Lords.

We hear a lot from fire service politicians about the importance of retained firefighters and the valuable contribution they make to their communities. Agreed! My question is why that recognition always seems to stop short when it comes to money. Why is it that the same politicians are unable to accept our arguments when it needs investment? And how can employers and government claim to support retained firefighters and then go into court and argue that their duties are actually fundamentally different from those of wholetime firefighters.

This case has once again



highlighted the double standards operating within the UK fire and rescue service with regards to RDS firefighters. All too often we hear praise for retained firefighters but we don't see people put their money where their mouth is.

The FBU fights for equality

for all employees within the service and for all firefighters. We believe this strengthens all of us in the fight for better conditions and for a better service. We work in one service, we are one profession. We need one union to fight for all of us.

Matt Wrack

YOUR LETTERS

After the sadness, an uplifting day

After the sadness endured since the 2 November tragedy at Atherstone-on-Stour, we would like to share with the fire and rescue Service, nationally, the day of the christening of baby George Stephens – Son of “Hero” firefighter, the late, Ashley Stephens.

George’s special day on Sunday 24 February, was extra special still, as he was christened at the Fire Service Chapel, at Moreton-in-Marsh. The sun shone all day and was just perfect for a christening.

Officiating was Rev. Canon David Capron, who is not only from our local church, St.Nicholas, Alcester, but also the Fire Service Chaplain for Warwickshire. The chapel, with its upturned brass bell font, colourful wall hangings and unusual lighting, was very beautiful and welcoming.

There was a rather unusual detail of George’s Christening – all the firefighters from Alcester station and their partners, as well as two firefighters from Bidford-on-Avon were honoured and delighted to be asked to be godparents by George’s Mum Emma, together with an Aunt, Uncle and close friends. Twenty in all!

Heaven help the boy when he is older. He will be frightened to set foot outside his door, without someone asking “George where are you going” or “what are you up to?” But hopefully he will grow up with the knowledge that he will never be short of people to turn to for help and guidance.

Who knows? Maybe young George will grow up in his father’s footsteps and become a firefighter too.

The christening was not without sadness. A candle was lit during the service for Ashley, a candle that had previously been at the Carol Service at Warwick in December and the Memorial Service at Coventry Cathedral in January. This represents the light of his life. However, it was a beautiful service that drew everyone present into the proceedings. Ashley would have been very proud of his little boy, and we are sure he was looking over him.

Afterwards, we returned to Alcester Fire Station, where we had a lovely few hours socialising and enjoying a buffet and catching up with family and friends. The general feeling at the end of the day was that what a beautiful, happy day it had been for George, and how we all felt it was very uplifting.

Maggie Walker
Wife of firefighter Mark Walker, Station 37, Alcester

→ Firefighter welcomes your letters relating to articles published in the magazine. We do not publish letters where an email address only is supplied. Please include full postal address and/or membership number. We may edit letters.

The Royal Courts of Justice in London. The Union is staggered the case has come this far

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PAUL MARRIOTT PHOTOGRAPHY

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Win this month’s quiz, and you’ll get a Radsail Pro iii 3m power kite and traction board. The 3.0M is predictable and very manoeuvrable making it great to learn with



WIN
a power kite and traction board see p22

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New shock figures show no built-in resilience

REGIONAL CONTROLS

There will be no more than 76 control operators and sometimes as few as 59 on duty from 11pm to 4pm the following day across the whole of England under the FireControl project. These hours coincide with the recent terror attempts, Buncefield and many other major incidents.

Fire Minister Parmjit Dhanda told MPs that “the number of staff employed within each RCC is a matter for each individual RCC company” but that these were the “indicative numbers” suggested by the project’s “staffing model” to provide a “resilient 24-hour operation”.

The revelation came in an answer to a parliamentary question in March.

Sharon Riley, FBU Executive Council member for emergency fire control staff said: “You never know when you will get a Buncefield or a Boscawen type incident which can develop rapidly. The current crewing systems and numbers on duty take account of this fact and resilience is built into the numbers using standard and minimum crewing levels.

“This also means that staff who are off duty are properly rested and in many cases live near their local control so are able, and usually willing, to respond to recall to duty to assist in busy periods as they did in last year’s floodings in the Gloucestershire and Humberside areas.

“The proposals to have variable crewing in RCCs have no resilience built in as it will only take one large incident for a particular RCC to be overstretched and the overflow calls to go to another RCC. With weather-related incidents this is bad news as weather fronts usually travel across the country and have a ripple effect”.

The latest confirmation about just how “resilient” the RCCs would be was made public as ministers were forced to admit that their “final” business case for regional control would be further delayed until the summer of this year.

PAUL BOX



Emergency fire control operators at work: currently resilience is built into the numbers using standard and minimum crewing levels



Humberside firefighters carry a coffin through the streets as the march makes its way through Grimsby town centre

Big march gives lift to Humberside campaign

CUTS FIGHTBACK

Hundreds of members of the public, FBU members and officials and local politicians marched in Grimsby on Saturday 15 March to show their opposition to swingeing cuts to the fire service. FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack and MPs Austin Mitchell of Great Grimsby and Shona McIsaac of Cleethorpes, Immingham and Barton, spoke at a rally after the march.

The march was due to be followed by a 90-minute debate in Parliament to discuss the cuts on Tuesday 18 March. The debate, secured by Shona McIsaac, was to be held in Westminster Hall.

Humberside's chief fire officer has proposed to close four fire stations - three retained duty system and one wholetime - as well as to downgrade two others by

removing one pump from a two-pump station at Immingham and one pump from a two pump station at Goole, turning one pump to an RDS-crewed pump. 110 firefighter posts are under threat.

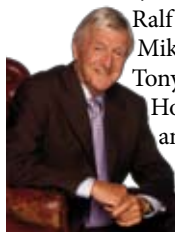
A petition containing 13,688 signatures opposing the closures was handed over to the Mayor of North East Lincolnshire, Councillor Stewart Swinburn, on 11 March, ahead of a meeting of the North East Lincolnshire Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillors on this committee voted unanimously against plans to shut down Waltham's retained station and axe Immingham West's second crew after hearing arguments put by the FBU and Humberside Fire and Rescue Service. Their recommendations will now be put to the Fire Authority for a final decision on April 11.

Celebs line up to save night-time cover

CUTS FIGHTBACK

Michael Parkinson, Natalie Imbruglia, Sir Elton John, Kris Marshall, Wayne Sleep, Ralf Little, Mike Golding, Tony Benn, Sue Holderness and John Challis are all now supporting



the campaign to keep Windsor fire station open 24 hours a day.

Michael Parkinson (left) said that the fire service was "an essential service and should be treated as such and people who seek to close fire stations need their heads examined." Natalie Imbruglia described Windsor fire station as a "vital part of the community".

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council is reportedly seeking a judicial review against the brigade with respect to the consultation process surrounding the decision to close the station at night.

→ Sign the E-Petition on the Number 10 Downing Street site at <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/windsor-fire-stn>

Sounding off!

JOHN MCGHEE

National Official Health, Safety & Welfare

International Workers Memorial Day

On the 28 April worldwide workers will mark the day by remembering those colleagues who have lost their lives at work or through work. Every year hundreds of thousands die in workplace "accidents" and millions die from occupational disease. Taking one day specially to mark this tragedy does not seem very much to ask.

Hopefully throughout the country our members will join with other workers and take time to remember those, especially our own colleagues, who have died in the last year.

The TUC agreed that this year's theme for International Workers' Memorial Day would be 'Good Occupational Health for all Workers'. It is hoped that brigades will organise an event such as a minute's silence or lowering of flags to half mast or distribute purple 'forget-me-not' ribbons.

Occupational Health and Safety has been something that workers have fought for as far back as the (Factory) Bill 1844 and not something we are allowed to take for granted.

Our chief officers don't always agree with the Union but we would expect that they would

Surely all workers are worth remembering, and certainly more than once per year! Remember the Dead. Fight for the Living.

at least share the concern and offer respect to those workers killed. Clearly this is not the case.

After being asked by one of our brigade secretaries if the brigade would "recognise this day" and whether something could be arranged such as whether "flags could be at half mast or something similar," the chief in question responded by saying:

"The Firefighters Memorial near St. Paul's Cathedral in London is the national venue used to mark all those firefighters that have lost their lives in both war and peace time. This year the event will take place on the 14th September and all Brigades are encouraged to lower flags to half mast. As this is so well established I cannot see the point in doing this for a second time on the 28th April."

It is clear that with attitudes like this that the battle for Health and Safety will continue. Surely all workers are worth remembering, and certainly more than once per year! Remember the Dead. Fight for the Living.

→ For further info on FBU Safety Representatives contact your brigade officials or John McGhee at FBU head office. More info on health and safety at: www.fbu.org.uk/workplace/healthsafety/

Injured firefighters making progress

CENTRAL SCOTLAND INCIDENT

Alan Robertson, one of the firefighters from Alloa Blue Watch who was seriously injured in a road traffic accident on 23 January in Tillicoultry, Central Scotland that resulted in the tragic death of watch manager John Noble, was still in the Southern General Hospital in Glasgow as Firefighter went to press. However, he was expected within days to be allowed home to his parent's house near Edinburgh.

Alan Robertson has had multiple operations and skin grafts and has been able to take some first steps using the frame he has been given to help

him. His right leg, which was very badly injured, is progressing and the doctors have said that they will give him an amber light just now but he has some way to go before they can give his right leg the green light for the future.

Alan Huntly, who suffered a broken ankle and collarbone has had the plaster removed and is having physiotherapy. He is progressing well.

Chris Robb, the driver, and Bryan Bell have both been back at work almost from day one.

The book of condolence for John Noble has now closed, but you can still view it online. John's family have requested that any donations be made to the Fire Service Benevolent Fund: www.fsnbf.org.uk

◆ The Union has hired two new members of head office staff. Dave Sibert, formerly a senior fire engineer at the Fire Protection Association, will fill the new post of Fire Safety/IRMP Advisor. With a long career in the fire service and once an FBU rep, Dave will be joining the FBU on 1 April. Trevor Cave, formerly head of the department of trade union studies at Park Lane College in Leeds, will have responsibility regards the Union's education programme. Trevor previously worked on FBU Union Learning Fund projects.

◆ In a novel departure from the traditions of FBU Education, FBU North East (Region 3) took some 20 students to Poland on March 4-7 for a school on how to combat fascism and the far right. The four-day school in Krakow took in a visit to Auschwitz. General Secretary Matt Wrack opened the school, with Executive Council member Alan McLean and regional officials Pete Wilcox, Steve Watson and Steve Gregg attending. Students ranged from new branch reps to brigade officials.

◆ Sixty-two students – women FBU members and reps from across the UK – attended the FBU Women's School at Wortley Hall, Sheffield, on March 7-9 to gain the tools to push forward women's health and safety and influence the Government equality and diversity strategy for the fire service. The school, under the direction of TUC tutors, also addressed women's democracy while students heard from a representative of the Iraqi women's league of its efforts to promote women's rights amid extremely difficult conditions in the country.

GMC members show a big HEART

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

FBU members in Greater Manchester have once again shown their support for a project supplying much-needed books to children in South Africa.

On Monday 3 March firefighters from Moss Side and Gorton Fire Stations faced freezing cold conditions to join GMC brigade chair Alan Anderson to load a container with books from across the UK destined for schools in Gauteng.

This province of South Africa has 2,100 schools and over 1.6 million learners. 30% of the schools have no libraries at all.

The books had been collected by the charity Community HEART Books for South Africa. The charity, set up by its patron Denis Goldberg – the only white man to stand trial with Nelson Mandela at the Rivonia Trial where he was given a life sentence in 1964 – collects books from all over the UK and Germany and sends them to South Africa.

Alan Anderson said Community Heart had asked if he could arrange for volunteers to do some loading. "I said 'yes' straight away," he said. "I wrote



Children from townships surrounding Jo'Burg and Pretoria read books supplied by Community HEART

to the Chief Fire Officer Barry Dixon asking him whether he could be so good as to spare me some of his firefighters for the morning. As usual he gladly obliged.

"The North West has now sent roughly 350,000 books and each time we are always grateful for the help we receive from firefighters at Moss Side and

Gorton Fire Stations and any one else who volunteers their services. Please keep coming."

→ If you use everyclick.com as your search engine and nominate Community HEART as your charity, everyclick will donate to this charity every time you use it. You just have to follow some simple instructions on the web site www.everyclick.com



JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

There will be no cuts in Kernow

CORNWALL

At a meeting of Cornwall County Council on 6 March, councillors scrapped the proposed 2007-2010 integrated risk management plan (IRMP), bringing to an end the FBU-led 14-month campaign against the ending of 24-hour fire cover and the axing of 16 frontline firefighter posts in the county.

The campaign, which generated a wave of public and local media support, started in January 2007 when the chief fire officer (CFO) announced that to keep the brigade within its meagre budget there would be a proposal in the 2007-2010 IRMP to downgrade the two-shift stations in Cornwall (Falmouth and Camborne) to day crewed.

Eight posts per watch would be lost and personnel would be spread to fill the gaps that had appeared elsewhere due to an ongoing freeze on wholetime recruitment.

FBU members in Cornwall, deeply concerned about the proposals, began a campaign of opposition involving local, regional and national members and officials. (FOA and RFU? No they didn't race to campaign against the proposed cuts).

One of the main elements of the campaign, highlighted within the media, with local and county councillors, and MPs, was the IRMP itself.

Integrated risk management to the majority of people in the service means applying resources to cover identified areas of risk, not applying resources depending on budget. It's an easy argument for anyone to understand when a certain large town has large areas of risk – docks, university, rented accommodation and so on – that you need the right fire cover in place.

The role of the local media was another key element. Two of the main local papers set up their own mini-campaigns complete with petitions to fill in. And by keeping the spotlight on the local Lib Dem county council politicians – the majority on the council – through news stories of incidents and likely outcomes if downgrading took place, the pressure was maintained on the council to drop the plans to downgrade.

The most high profile example was the

tragic incident at the Penhallow Hotel in Newquay in the summer of 2007. This highlighted the depleted state of the brigade in terms of resources (aerial appliances came from Devon as both Cornwall ALPs were off the run) and staff, both retained and wholetime.

To maintain pressure on the county council required a great deal of effort and this is where the FBU members across all duty systems in Cornwall and particularly Falmouth and

The strength of the campaign was such that the 2007-10 IRMP was never approved. The decision was repeatedly deferred and then the 2008-11 IRMP went out for consultation

Camborne came in. It was the station reps and members, both wholetime and retained, who lobbied local councillors, attended meetings, collected thousands of petitions and provided the media with information to keep the campaign going.

A national rally was organised in the summer of 2007 in Truro which saw members

and officials from across the country attend with local politicians and members of other trade unions (apologies for the weather) to support the campaign. This was followed in September by a march from Falmouth to Camborne, organised and covered by the local paper and a further march and rally in Falmouth early in 2008 – all done to keep that pressure up and ensure that the issue didn't stray from councillors minds!

Throughout the campaign there was always the realisation that it might escalate into an industrial campaign and therefore branches across the county had been discussing the possibility of a strike ballot should the need arise.

The strength of the campaign was such that the 2007-10 IRMP never got approved in 2007. The decision was repeatedly deferred and then the 2008-11 IRMP went out for consultation.

The council agreed on 20 February to add £1.1m to the budget for 2008/9, £1.6m for 2009/10 and £1.9m for 2010/11. Although this extra funding is filling the void left by previous years' budget cuts, it does allow the CFO to recruit wholetime firefighters up to establishment, removing the need to downgrade and provide investment in RDS across the county.

Mike Tremellen, brigade chair, Cornwall



Attacks on public servants to mean tougher sentences

ATTACKS ON FIREFIGHTERS

Hot on the heels of publication of the Union's new report on attacks on firefighters, moves for bigger punishments for attacks on public service workers were announced.

The Sentencing Guidelines Council issued definitive guidelines stating that violent offenders who carry weapons to the scene of a crime and use them on victims should face severe sentences.

Sentences for such offenders who inflict particularly grave injuries should be in a range of 10 to 16 years imprisonment, it said.

In the guidelines, implemented on March 3, the council set out a series of factors that would aggravate assaults and should result in greater sentences. These include:



- Offenders operating in gangs or groups;
- The deliberate targeting of vulnerable victims or choosing isolated places for carrying out an attack;
- Attacks on victims working in the public sector or providing a service to the public.

Council member Judge

Michael Mettyear said: "Assaults on public sector workers and those providing a service to the public including members of the emergency services and transport workers cause harm to the individual and to wider society.

"They can result in reduced or cancelled services, discourage people from working in certain jobs and undermine public confidence. The sentence handed down by the court should reflect that.

"Furthermore, where an offence is committed against someone providing a service to the public and that worker is also particularly vulnerable ... this will constitute further aggravation."

→ For more on our campaign against attacks on firefighters and the new FBU/LRD Easy Targets? report visit www.fbu.org.uk



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◆ The Union and employers reached agreement on protected pay for officers at the National Joint Council as *Firefighter* was going to press on March 13. This followed a consultation process with officer members. Details were not available at the time of writing. Members should contact their FBU rep for more information.

◆ The TUC has criticised the budget, unveiled on 12 March, for containing "more bad news" for public servants. General Secretary Brendan Barber said: "Buried in the budget small print is the news that there will be an additional round of operational cuts after the current Comprehensive Spending Review round to be announced later this year. Departments already need to find 5 per cent "efficiency" savings and public services are facing cuts of £30 billion a year."

◆ The BBC spent a day at Wimbledon Fire Station, London as part of the BBC RaW (Reading and Writing) and book week. Through the Union Learning Fund the FBU has circulated thousands of short stories to fire stations and other workplaces in the UK fire and rescue service. Firefighters at Wimbledon read one of these books and then had a discussion around the content. For more on the FBU's Lifelong Learning projects: <http://ulf.fbu.org.uk/>.

◆ The Union has recently achieved further funding for its lifelong learning projects, so a position of Regional ULF Co-ordinator exists in Region Five (North West). Where this would involve a secondment to the project, appropriate agreement will be required with the successful applicant's brigade. Closing date for applications is Monday 7 April and they can be accepted by email or in writing. For further info: Trevor Shanahan – Mobile 07917759473 or e-mail Trevor.shanahan@fbu.org.uk



Torquay is one of the towns facing a reduction in firefighting posts

24 wholetime posts face axe

CUTS FIGHTBACK

The Union is upping the campaign against cuts to services in Devon and Somerset after the fire authority voted to axe 24 wholetime posts and allow dual-crewing of aerial platforms to deal with a £1.3m budget shortfall.

The FBU has described the cuts as "disgusting" and said they could cost lives.

The fire authority has claimed the decision taken was the option that would have the least adverse impact on the service.

The FBU says it had put forward an alterna-

tive option that did not involve cuts in frontline services.

The fire authority voted to axe 24 posts in Exeter, Torquay and Barnstaple and said the posts cuts would not result in job losses.

Bob Walker, FBU Devon and Somerset brigade chair said: "We say that cuts cost lives and we want to keep the services as they are, and as the public expects them."

The FBU is seeking an urgent meeting with the brigade to reverse the proposed cuts and will lobby all councillors on the fire authority about its concerns.



Portsmouth is effectively an island

FIFTH COLUMN

An anonymous take on events in a brigade near you

The closure of Copnor Fire Station in Portsmouth City – along with the removal of its water tender ladder to Southsea and special equipment unit to Cosham – was first proposed in Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service's IRMP in autumn 2006.

To justify the move, HF&RS decided to run a 12-month trial, starting on 1 September 2006, during which Copnor Fire Station would be closed between the hours of 09:30 and 21:00.

Portsmouth is effectively an island, accessible only from the north, with just three major roads leading onto the island. This in itself causes its own risk to the emergency services. Copnor is in the middle, with Southsea at the south of the island, and Cosham to the north. The removal of the centrally based station able to respond in any direction is unthinkable. It would mean longer travel distances increasing attendance times. Opposition was immediate.

HF&RS produced a report on the trial that indicated a slight drop in attendance times across the all three Portsmouth stations. The FBU and members of the community in Copnor highlighted flaws in the data produced from the trial: the Copnor pumping appliance was on its own station ground carrying out station duties for more times than it was on Southsea's station ground; and between 2005 and 2007 the number of calls on Copnor's station ground increased by 16.17%, whilst Southsea's calls dropped by 18.83%. HF&RS' motto is "Making Hampshire Safer". HF&RS was in fact lowering standards, leaving the public at greater risk.

At a packed public meeting held by HF&RS in October 2007, Copnor residents directed their anger at the proposals to close their local fire station and voted unanimously to keep Copnor open. Another public meeting the following month for residents who had arrived at the first but had been turned away for lack of space produced the same result.

This overwhelming public rejection of the plans and the political pressure applied by the FBU led to cross-party opposition from all local MPs and Portsmouth City councillors.

HAMPSHIRE

The Tories organised an engine displaying "Conservatives Back Copnor Fire Stations." Then they voted to close it

The campaign to "Save Copnor Fire Station" went from strength to strength. As political lobbying continued, every Copnor household was leafleted. You couldn't miss the campaign posters, tee-shirts, caps, badges and car stickers. Copnor residents and Copnor station members made a huge contribution to the campaign with letter writing and lobbying, and by raising awareness of the implications of the station closure.

A Copnor ward – previously a Tory stronghold – became vacant in January 2008. Andy Fraser, a retired former Copnor firefighter supported by FBU

Southern Region stood in the by-election as a Liberal Democrat, on a single issue: "Keep Copnor Fire Station Open." Andy won the seat with an overwhelming majority and was then elected to the fire authority.

The final decision on the closure was to be made at a fire authority meeting on 13 February. All indications were that HF&RS proposals would be rejected. All Liberal Democrats, Labour and a minority of the Tories indicated they were against the closure.

Conservatives from Portsmouth City Council and their prospective MP organised a fire engine to attend the meeting. It displayed a banner "Conservatives Back Copnor Fire Station."

A petition against the closure, with over 20,000 signatures and deputations, was presented to the fire authority. Massive public lobbying and cross-party support produced a last-minute amendment.

Copnor was still to be closed, but with the appliance at a local community centre in the Copnor area for an undisclosed period of time during the day. No detail was given on the plan, and the public were not consulted on the content of the amendment. HF&RS' decision to close Copnor Fire Station passed by 13 to 11.

The promised support ebbed due to political games and manoeuvres to seek a compromise agreement. The amendment gave an exit route to disgruntled Tory councillors under pressure from both the strong public opinion and thoughts for the future of their own seats.

The public consultation process has produced an absolute sham. Public opinion was ignored.

UNION SECURES FINAL LEGAL VICTORY

The Union has won its eight-year legal battle in what constitutes the final nail in the coffin to discrimination against firefighters working the retained duty system

The Union has finally won its eight-year legal battle to secure an end to discrimination against firefighters working the retained duty system (RDS), following an Employment Tribunal judgment. The case has major implications for millions of part-time workers who will also benefit from the rights established during 8-years of legal action.

The Croydon Employment Tribunal judgment is reinforced by a landmark legal judgment in the case by the House of Lords on 1 March 2006 in favour of the union. The Employment Tribunal found that RDS firefighters were discriminated against when they were denied access to a pension and the same sick pay (pro-rata) as wholtime firefighters.

The judgment, based on the principles set out by the House of Lords earlier in the case, establishes the right to equal treatment between part-time and full time workers across a whole range of employment issues. Apart from sick pay and pensions it potentially includes training and all other work-related payments, including expenses.

The case centred on the exclusion, before April 2006, of retained firefighters from the Firefighters' Pension Scheme and worse treatment under the sick pay scheme. They claimed they were being treated less favourably because they were part-time workers and that this was unlawful.

The attempts by fire service employers and the Secretary of State to justify the discrimination in this case were dismissed. A further claim in relation to increased pay for additional responsibilities has been put on hold for further clarification.

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said: "This old-fashioned discrimination deprived thousands of firefighters of a pension and condemned them to worse sick pay. Now retained firefighters, and millions of part-time workers, will no longer have to accept second class employment rights.

"We can't have firefighters at the same incidents, doing the same job, with one group being discriminated against. A firefighter is a firefighter, we take the same risks at the same

incidents and we deserve the same equal treatment.

"The FBU has ended the practice of firefighters who had served their communities for up to 30 years being denied a pension. We are proud we have defeated the strenuous attempts of Government and the employers to justify this appalling behaviour.

"The Union has fought this case for many years against great odds. Once again we have proved we are the only organisation in the fire service with the will and the means to protect firefighters of all duty systems.

"No one else in the fire service had the guts, the will or the means to do what we have done. In winning we have also established the clear legal rights of part-time workers not to be treated less favourably than full-time workers.

"What we now need is a proper negotiated agreement to set out how we put things right. I would urge the Government and employers to accept this as the right way ahead"

The FBU's National Retained Committee (NRC) described the result as "historic" and commended the dedication and determination of a significant number of officials, representatives, activists, members and Thompsons, the FBU's solicitors. It also thanked in particular Richard

The Union has fought this case for many years against great odds. No one else in the fire service had the guts, the will or the means to do what we have done

Arthur from Thompsons, QC Robin Allen and barrister Martin Seaward whose "steadfast and resolute belief in our case has steered it to this great conclusion."

The NRC also paid tribute to FBU members from Berkshire and Kent who gave evidence in support of our claim, describing the delivery of their evidence and their performance under very high pressure cross examination





RDS station manager Leslie Chappell, from Marden, Kent, celebrates victory

as “inspirational” to NRC officials who witnessed the proceedings.

Tam Mitchell, FBU Executive Council member for firefighters working retained duty system (RDS) said:

“We are delighted we have won after such a long and hard fight for justice. Never mind what Government and employers say to our faces, they were in court for eight years justifying discrimination against us.

“In many parts of the UK, without retained firefighters there would be no fire service. We are essential to the safety of the communities we serve and often the first and only firefighters at an incident.

“The FBU has had to fight hard to win this victory. The dangers we face at the incidents we work at do not

discriminate between duty systems.

“No one we cut out of a car wreck or helped from a fire or flood ever asked if we were retained or wholetime. The only ones to do that have been employers and Government, and now they can stop asking.

“I am proud that I am one of the elected national representatives for firefighters working the retained duty system at this time to see this victory. Over the years many others in stations, brigades, regions and at national level worked to this end and I hope we recognise them as playing a key part in winning this fight”

Pete Preston, Secretary of the NRC, added: “The implications of this victory will impact widely on the service we serve in. All current aspects of less favourable treatment will be open to challenge, and challenging this on behalf of RDS firefighters will be the FBU, the only trade union that represents all sections of the fire and rescue services regardless of the duty systems worked.

“The pensions case taken on by the FBU on behalf of our RDS members has been watched over in anticipation by many of us who have long felt the injustice of being prevented from contributing to a pension scheme solely on the grounds of the duty system they work.

“Rectifying this great injustice has taken a great deal of time and a very significant financial investment by the FBU. Now finally justice has been seen to be done”

The legal victory for firefighters working the retained duty system follows an 8-year legal battle which started in 2000 when 12,000 cases were lodged at Employment Tribunal. The case was originally lost at tribunal, Employment Appeal Tribunal and Court of Appeal.

The case returned to Employment Tribunal in March and November 2007 and again in January 2008. The final tribunal decision was reserved.

The FBU used the Part-Time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000 to argue that retained firefighters, as “part-time” workers, are being discriminated against in relation to their wholetime colleagues.

The cases were brought against ALL Fire Service employers of firefighters working RDS – who are FBU members – throughout the United Kingdom and what was then the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Twelve “lead” cases were selected from the Royal Berkshire and Kent and Medway Towns Fire Authorities out of a total of 12,000 employment cases lodged.

Said 53-year-old Bracknell watch manager Martin Kerby, one of the six RDS claimants from Royal Berkshire:

“I am pleased the Union took up the issue in the first place. It’s been a long time coming but I have now got the rights I always should have had. This is a real step forward for firefighters working the retained duty system, and all part-time workers.”

Leslie Chappell, 49, a station manager from Marden, Kent: “I’m glad that the legal case has come to a satisfactory conclusion not just for RDS firefighters in Kent but across the country.”

Leslie, who also gave evidence to the Croydon Employment Tribunal, added: “Retained firefighters do the same job as wholetime firefighters. We all show great commitment to the Service and to serving our community in terms of our time, hard work and professionalism. We should get the proper rewards for this. We should get equal treatment. This is what we have been fighting for since the Union launched the legal case eight years ago. And this has been finally recognised.”

Legal challenge launched

The Judicial Review hearing into the Government's pension guidance began at the High Court on 6 and 7 March



A legal challenge to new Government guidance on firefighter pensions began at the High Court on 6 March. The new guidance means badly injured and disabled firefighters face being sacked and their pension delayed until they are 60.

The Union has described the situation as "totally unacceptable" and launched a legal, political and industrial campaign. A Judicial Review – the only way to challenge the guidance – started after three disabled and retired firefighters had their pensions removed by London fire brigade.

The threat of an injunction forced the service to start paying the pensions again and pay back the money it had stopped. On the morning the case started the brigade agreed to pay interest on the money it had stopped.

The decision of the judge is "reserved" meaning it will be made in writing at a later date. Part of the case was adjourned to a later date.

Before the hearing started FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said: "The incidents we work at are treated as deadly hazards by everyone else. It is totally unacceptable to expect firefighters to take risks others wouldn't then sack them if they are injured or become disabled.

"Firefighters test the limits of health and safety to save lives whether in a fire or at a terrorist incident. The deal was if we were injured or suffered ill-health we were looked after and the Government has ripped up that understanding."

One of the firefighters, Martin Marrion, said: "I never thought it would come to this to save a pension, but here we are."

Neil Burke said: "I'm more than surprised to be here, I thought the pension was safe. None of us three could have got this far without the Union and the support of our colleagues and the Union at local, regional and national level. We want to thank everyone who has supported us in this challenge."

Andy Scott added after the hearing: "My wife and I would like to thank the FBU and

its solicitors Thompsons for all their help and support over the last few months and especially at the Judicial Review hearings.

"The Union's legal team presented our case extremely well in court and the Government's position was once again shown to be an utter disgrace. Ministers have made it impossible for dedicated public servants who suffer injury or illness while carrying out their duties to protect communities to get a pension or alternative employment in the fire service.

Appallingly callous

"My family and I have suffered because of this. It is appallingly callous. I was proud to be in court together with the FBU fighting for justice for all firefighters across the UK."

Under pensions guidelines issued by the Government in 2004, a disabled or badly injured firefighter would be given an ill health pension unless they could be redeployed to a job within his or her role. The FBU says that guidance is correct.

New guidance issued in September 2006 means any firefighter capable of doing any single part of their work, even answering the phone, will not get a pension regardless of whether they are, in fact, redeployed to those restricted duties.

This effectively makes it impossible for any firefighter to get an ill health pension, even if they are seriously disabled. And if there is no job to which they can be re-deployed, the rules force fire authorities to sack them with no pension or other payment.

The Government now says the guidance it issued in 2004 and another amendment to the scheme were wrong. It says the guidance it issued in 2006 and which has caused the current problems is correct.

In ministerial statements, the Government has said it is not its intention that injured and disabled firefighters should be sacked without a pension.

But in the court and in witness statements the Government argues that sacking injured and disabled firefighters on capability grounds is an acceptable "exit route".

The FBU case challenges the validity of the pensions guidance issued by Government in 2006 and the actions of the Board of Medical Referees in the cases of the three firefighters.

The union's view is that it is long-established law that no guidance (formal or informal) can



ched at the High Court



(right to left)
Neil Burke,
Andy Scott
and Martin Marrion

re-write the statutory provisions the guidance relates to.

The two different justifications given by the Government for the 2006 guidance were contradictory. One justification (on issuing the 2006 guidance) was that fire services were successful in reducing the number of ill-health and injury retirements, the other (later) justification was that fire services were not successful in reducing these awards.

In any event, the Union's barrister told the court, the most recent figures for ill-health and injury retirements in the fire service showed these retirements were running at 3.8 per thousand members of the scheme. This was a significant reduction from the figure of 15.7 per thousand in 2003/04. This is comparable to that of senior civil servants whose ill-health and injury retirement rate is 3.1 per thousand members of the scheme.

The union said the Board of Medical Referees had exceeded its powers and that the London Fire Service should not have relied on its decision and taken the unprecedented step of stopping the pensions.

Pretty clear

The union quoted Minister Parmjit Dhanda from a House of Commons debate on 22 January: "It was never the intention of the Government that a firefighter who is injured should not receive an appropriate award or be left with no job or recompense." This seems pretty clear. But the Government appeared to distance itself from these comments, saying they should be seen in the context of wider policy.

Civil Servant Martin Hill's witness statement to the court said in part: "The policy which underlies this [Mr Dhanda's comments] is based on the recommendations of the 2000 Review of Ill Health Retirement in the Public Sector ... Specifically, those recommendations were that employers should: ... ensure that the full range of exits routes are available (ill health retirement, voluntary/**compulsory redundancy, early retirement, dismissal on grounds of capability or conduct**), and **ensure that the most appropriate exit route is used in every case.**" [Firefighter emphasis]

→ The union urges members and officials to continue lobbying MPs over the issue of ill-health pensions. For an MPs briefing note and letters to MPs visit www.fbu.org.uk

→ Watch Martin Marrion speak outside the High Court on FBU-Tube: <http://www.youtube.com/fbutube>

As life changing events go, becoming a parent takes some beating. After the first baby arrives, life is never the same again: just ask new fathers and mothers - or the parents of teenagers.

But if you're young, free and single, why bother about parental rights at work? Well, before long you could have a highly personal stake in knowing the score. Are new fathers entitled to two weeks paid leave after the birth of their child? Do women in the service have a right to return to their old job when they get back from maternity leave? Are those planning to adopt entitled to any paid time off? (see bottom of page for answers)

The FBU is ahead of the game. It has just published *Negotiating Maternity, Paternity and Adoption Rights*, a ground-breaking negotiating "toolkit" for local union officials. It's meant, as it says on the cover "For All FBU members" and contains up to date information on statutory rights and examples of best practice to get the best deal to support families within the fire and rescue service.

Every station, watch, and control room is different, and canny clued-up negotiators can help secure imaginative solutions to meet the needs of individual members whether they are returning from maternity leave or supporting their partner after childbirth.

Women are obviously in the frontline when dealing with pregnancy, birth and maternity leave. But the FBU toolkit recognises many male firefighters would relish taking a hands-on role in their child's early weeks and months. Families, it acknowledges, come in all shapes and sizes and firefighters caring for children deserve support.

John McGhee, national officer for



Emma Davis and colleagues at Cambridge Fire Station

health, safety and welfare, believes the new policy, developed by the National Women's Committee and drawing on the experience of pregnant members, mothers and fathers, could help transform attitudes to parenting within the Fire and Rescue Service.

"It's fine saying that fathers want to play a more active role when they start a family. But unless we have the right policies in place it's impossible for them to do so. This new document should help us achieve practical solutions for our members." Flexible working is usually associated with meeting the needs of pregnant women and new mothers. But, he argues, in some cases, this can best be achieved by allowing fathers some short-term flexibility when baby arrives - such as swapping night shifts for day shifts for a month or two if the new infant is particularly fractious at night. Station life need not be disrupted, the firefighter carries on working and earning and his harassed partner gets a break.

Such flexible solutions can also be a good deal for the FRS, as Cambridgeshire firefighter and NWC women's rep Emma Davis found when she negotiated an imaginative work schedule during her pregnancy. "They were going to put me on days, but I pointed out that the policy says that as long as there are no medical reasons not to, you can stay following the watch while pregnant. Risk assessments were done for me that ruled out things like stretching, lifting, going up ladders or on the appliance. I now follow the watch during the two day shifts and work from home on projects for two days. The service gets a better deal from this than me coming in on nights." Not all women are as confident as Emma - and some find it difficult even disclosing they are pregnant if they don't feel they are in a supportive environment. This is all the more worrying as early disclosure is vital to protect the health of operational firefighters and their babies.

Getting to grips with what you're

EVERY parent MATTERS

As life changing events go, becoming a parent takes some beating. The Union is here to help - and has launched a new negotiating guide for its local officials to get the best deal to support families within the fire and rescue service

entitled to can be a bit confusing, and the Union is there to get you the best deal. But line managers can often have many demands on their time, which is why the FBU is calling for a Family Support Manager in each FRS to act as an informed and sympathetic contact point for prospective parents.

It would, says NWC secretary Kerry Baigent, help focus minds. Kerry has helped many pregnant firefighters get their pregnancy and maternity entitlements. Pregnant women can do without extra stress, and Kerry is a firm believer in talking through options to get results. "If you engage at the beginning of the pregnancy and there is a three way dialogue between the individual, the union and the line manager, or, in future we hope, the Family Support Manager, you are more likely to come up with an arrangement which suits everyone."

FBU members who adopt or foster have specific needs - such as having to attend courses. When Warren Gee was a frontline firefighter in Wythenshawe, he and his wife adopted one-and-a-half-year-old Amy, as a sister for their daughter. Doctors had warned the couple they were unlikely to have more children - though a few years after Amy joined the family, a baby brother was born. Amy, now 17, became the middle sibling and the Gee family was complete. As EC rep for the North West, Warren is keen to see all families get the help they need, and welcomes the new document for recognising that all prospective parents deserve support.

"When we were adopting Amy, the brigade and colleagues were more than helpful. We had to go to pre adoption courses and they made sure I could swap days off and store up bank holidays."

Nearly 20 years later, a Lincolnshire couple who are both FBU members are in the process of adopting a 20 month old boy they began looking after last Autumn. If all goes well, they hope to adopt his younger sister too.

After trying IVF unsuccessfully, the couple were determined to try for adoption and "haven't looked back". They've been approved to adopt two young children, but the lengthy process is not yet complete for the little boy. So far, it has proved to be "an extremely

**Canny clued-up
negotiators can help secure
imaginative solutions to
meet the needs of
individual members**

positive experience". The couple have a very good relationship with their social worker, which has made the rigorous and searching pre-adoption procedure less intrusive than it would seem in less empathetic hands. They are both enjoying caring for the little boy who came to them at 14 months, teething and fast growing out of babyhood.

The local authority in charge of Lincolnshire's FRS has been very supportive. The adoptive mother has opted to take adoption leave, which will be extended if the couple go on to adopt the little boy's sister. Her watch manager husband is turning out to be a very involved father, relishing the role. The local authority also pays adoptive parents above the rate outlined in the "Grey Book". This positive experience is in sharp contrast to a hurtful and insensitive email from an ex

employee who said IVF treatment was "no different to cosmetic surgery". As IVF did not count as ante-natal care, time off for injections, rest, and scans would have to come out of the would-be mother's own time. The couple have now put all that behind them as they settle down as a family.

Allan Guest, chair of the Officers National Committee, has two grown up children and he and his wife have fostered nearly 30 under sevens since 1994 at their home in Cornwall. Many came on long term placements prior to adoption, and Allan has received an award for pre-adoption fostering. He has also featured in a national fostering recruitment campaign dressed in his fire service kit. "Fostering is fantastically rewarding, and the brigade has been very supportive," he says. "You get to meet some wonderful children. It certainly helps you keep a perspective on what you and others could otherwise see as a problem!" The couple still keep in touch with three children who returned to their families, including a little boy on the autistic spectrum who they fostered for two and a half years.

The Service is keen to recruit more women and bringing in more family friendly policies as well as beefing up maternity benefits could well help boost the number of women joining. It is no surprise that the FRS's that pay the best rates - London and Lothian - have the best track record in recruiting and retaining women. Maybe it won't be long before male firefighters start lobbying loudly for better paternity pay and maternity support leave. Every parent matters - and the sooner the service gets the message, the better. The Union is certainly on the case.

→ Answers: Yes, Yes. Yes. Ask your FBU official.



WHAT DOES A FIRE INVESTIGATION DOG HANDLER DO?

Nikki Harvey is a dog handler for Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service. She now trains, looks after, lives and works with CC, a black Labrador, one of just 17 fire investigation dogs in the country. It's a full-on job and only dog lovers should apply.

Last year, Nikki Harvey swapped her job in the control room at Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service for life as a dog handler for the service. She now trains, looks after, lives and works with CC, a black Labrador, one of just 17 fire investigation dogs in the country. It's a full-on job and only dog lovers should apply, but Nikki is relishing her new role.

Fire investigation dogs are trained to sniff out remaining traces of ignitable liquids to help see if the scene of a fire is also a crime scene.

The job starts when the scene is "cold". Once firefighters have doused the flames, the smoke has gone and the debris has cooled down, CC can get to work without compromising his safety or wellbeing. His job has been properly risk-assessed and Nikki won't be taking any chances.

CC even wears specialised rubber "boots" to protect his paws when rummaging through fire debris. An orange harness signals he is in work mode, and, Nikki says, it is useful in deterring those at the scene who may be tempted to stroke him and distract him from the sniffing out of suspect liquids.

Nikki spells out how useful a dog can be when investigating just how a building ended up on fire. "Even after the most severe fires, if there's something being used illegitimately to cause it, such as petrol, there will be some kind of remains left for the dog to find."

Fire investigation dogs have to be trained, of course, to harness their remarkable sniffing powers to the cause. As CC is Nikki's first fire dog, the two have learned and trained together. Nikki now knows all about the wonders of the canine olfactory system, which enables CC and other fire investigation dogs to sniff out traces of lighter fluid or acetone at 30 paces or locate petrol droplets on a

rag in the middle of a field.

Tennis balls play a big part in training fire dogs to sniff out ignitables, Nikki explains. "You build up a really big drive for wanting to look for a tennis ball, and once you've got that driver installed and the dog is consistently finding tennis balls in searches, you then replace it with all the things you want him to find on the job. He's trained on the ten most commonly used ignitable liquids."

These include paraffin, petrol, acetone and lighter fluid for both cigarettes and barbeques. So he transfers the excitement felt when searching for a tennis ball to the crucial investigative tool of sniffing out substances that could well be of interest to arsonists or those intent on insurance fraud through burning down their own premises.

It is, says Nikki, always satisfying when CC finds something that sheds new light on a fire. "We went to a school fire with a scene of crime officer we've worked with quite a lot. The fire had been confined to a storeroom and it looked like it could have been an electrical fault in a cupboard. But CC went in really quickly indicating he had found something in the middle of the small room. When we dug down below the debris we found a glass beer bottle with some ignitable fluid in it. It had been dropped through a skylight and he sniffed it out."

So there was something dodgy about the blaze after



Nikki and CC can be called out to East Anglia: Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Cambridge and even Bedfordshire





Best boots on for the boss: Nikki introduces CC – in his rubber shoes – to Hertfordshire ACO John Mills and Mike Norris, chief executive of sponsor Computacenter

all, and CC had alerted the investigators.

Sophisticated electronic equipment will never make fire dogs – whose amazing sense of smell can even pick up on odourless white spirit – redundant, she argues. And dogs don't ever come up with a false reading.

Training is important and this includes getting together with a bunch of fellow fire dogs and their handlers. Such a session took place recently on CC's home turf, at a disused Hertfordshire primary school. Samples of substances were hidden in various training scenarios, blind searches set up and samples hidden in trees and fields.

Nikki is training to become a fire investigation officer, which fits well with her dog handling role. She also has a golden Labrador at home – Barney – and the two dogs get on fine. When CC eventually retires, at seven, Nikki would like to keep him.

Though based at Stevenage in Hertfordshire, Nikki and CC can be called out to East Anglia: Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Cambridge and even Bedfordshire, as these counties don't have a fire investigations dog between them. Sometimes they are called on to help out in London and Buckinghamshire too.

CC is sponsored by Computacenter, whose UK headquarters is in Hatfield Hertfordshire. This is no doubt welcomed at Hertfordshire fire and rescue service HQ as well as by the company which benefits from a nifty bit of product placement. And there's a nice irony to be relished as it's glaringly obvious a computer could never take the place of a fully trained fire investigation dog when it comes to finding an ignitable in an open field.

Working For You

ADE KEVERN

Health and Safety Rep

Carlisle

At around 3am on 14 October 2006 we were mobilised to a barn fire, at Waverton near Wigton. Five pumps from Wigton, Silloth, Aspatria, Maryport and Carlisle attended. On arrival, the barn was well alight, and crews got to work. Some two hours later a potentially fatal near miss occurred.

A member of the Wigton crew tried to gain access to an area of the burning barn, via double gates. Prior to opening the gates, he shone his torch through to check for danger. In the dark, it appeared to be an area of hard standing. After deeming it safe, the member then opened the left hand gate. As he stepped forward, he began to slide down a ramped area into a slurry pit. He luckily managed to grab the gate and pull himself out. He was washed down and carried on working with no ill effects.

It later emerged that it could have been very different. Had he entered via the other gate he would have been in the main section of the 12-foot-deep slurry pit. It would have been very difficult for him to pull himself free. And there were slim chances of hearing shouts for help with the noise of appliances.

This invisible hazard had the potential to kill, not only the firefighters attending this incident but also farm staff, their children and others visiting the farm.

The occurrence was recorded as a near miss. An FBU report was taken to the service's health & safety quarterly meeting and the service then contacted the HSE, but urgency was lacking. The FBU then contacted the HSE directly. The HSE arranged a site visit and acted. It insisted the farmer re-fence to HSE standards, put up signs preventing access and warning of the dangers and ensure that the slurry pit was not overfilled.

Thanks to the intervention of the FBU and FBU members, there is also now improved agricultural incidents information available at incidents via appliance onboard computers; agricultural safety has been highlighted to firefighters countywide; and posters highlighting hidden dangers on farms have been distributed to firefighters, farmers and ambulance crews.

This is not just about trying to prevent someone drowning in the slurry pit at this farm. There are thousands more farms up and down the country and other hidden dangers.

With cutbacks in the HSE resulting in fewer inspections and fewer prosecutions over dangerous workplaces and dubious working practices, it is even more important that members inform their FBU H&S reps about health and safety concerns at work and while out and about in our communities. With your help, we can save lives.

➔ More info: www.fbu.org.uk/workplace/healthsafety/

What was that?

One in seven people has some degree of hearing loss

DEAFNESS

Did you know that one person in seven has some degree of hearing loss? Most are older people who gradually lose their hearing as part of the ageing process.

But prolonged and repeated exposure to loud noise – at work or at leisure – can damage your hearing.

More young people than ever before are subjecting their ears to potentially damaging noise, especially at discos and clubs. The damage builds up gradually, and the effects may not be noticed until years later when it is too late.

You can prevent deafness due to noise by taking sensible, practical steps to protect your hearing and by reducing the length of time you listen to very loud sounds.

Ageing and noise affect the 'cochlea' in the inner ear, which is the part of the ear that converts sound waves into signals to the brain. But there are also some conditions – like wax blocking the ear canal, damage to the eardrum and inflammation or other problems in the middle ear – that simply prevent sound waves from getting through to the cochlea. These can often be treated.

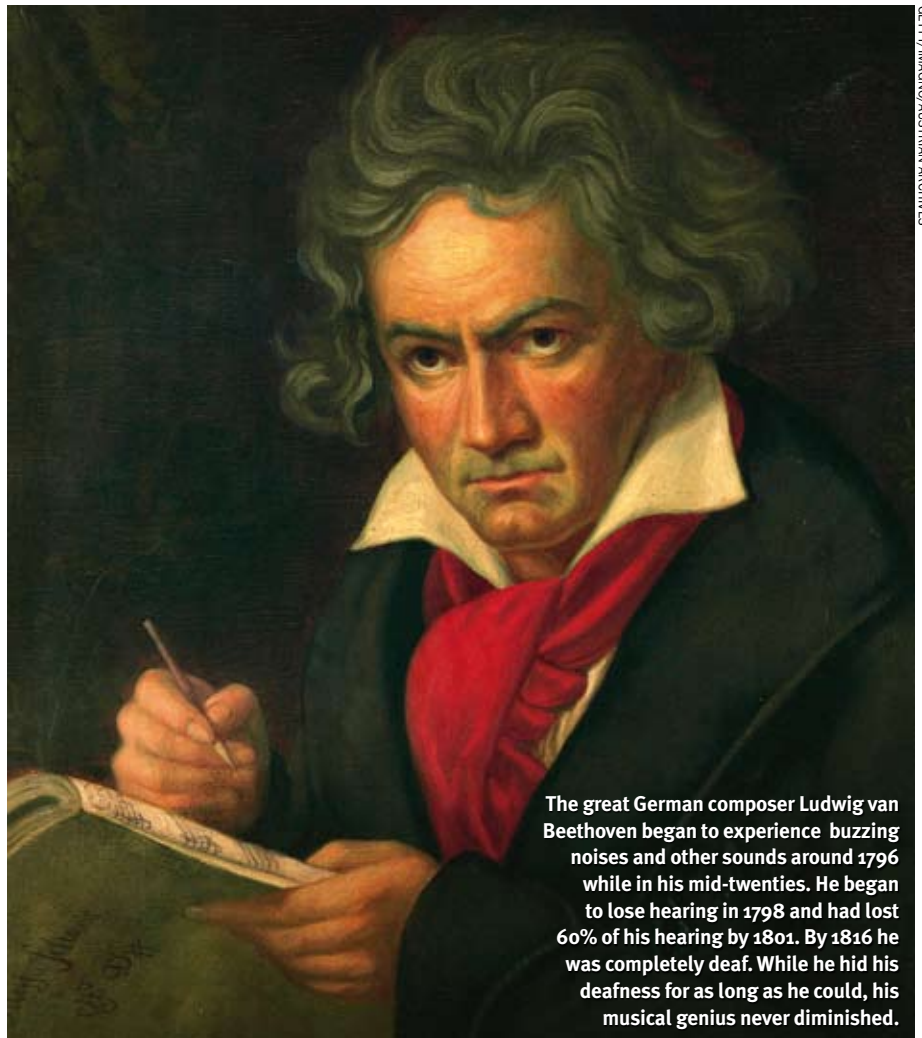
The RNID charity's Hearing Check campaign aims to get people to look after their hearing and to help tackle the stigma and embarrassment surrounding hearing loss.

Research by RNID shows that 41% of people believe those with a hearing loss cover it up or fail to seek help because they are embarrassed. The campaign challenges the negative perceptions of hearing loss and urges people to look after their hearing by having regular hearing checks and getting all the help they need.

Lots of tips on looking after your hearing, and what to do if you think you are losing your hearing are available from RNID's information line on 0808 808 0123 or online at www.rnid.org.uk. Information is also provided on how to identify if a family member's hearing is getting worse and what to do in this situation.

The first step if you are concerned that you or someone you know might be losing their hearing, is to take RNID's hearing check and find out for certain.

The number is 0845 600 5555 and the check is quick and easy to use and takes you less than five minutes – that's less than five minutes to change your life. Perhaps you feel



GETTY/IMAGNO/AUSTRIAN ARCHIVES

The great German composer Ludwig van Beethoven began to experience buzzing noises and other sounds around 1796 while in his mid-twenties. He began to lose hearing in 1798 and had lost 60% of his hearing by 1801. By 1816 he was completely deaf. While he hid his deafness for as long as he could, his musical genius never diminished.

HEARING LOSS – ACTION POINTS

- ◆ How's your hearing? Take RNID's telephone hearing check by dialing 0845 600 5555
- ◆ Encourage your colleagues, friends and relatives to take the check too
- ◆ If you have any questions about hearing loss contact RNID Information Line on 0808 808 0123 or visit website www.rnid.org.uk

some empathy with the following caller to RNID:

"I'm 45 years old and in good health. I noticed about a year ago people started to get cross when I missed what they said. They thought I wasn't paying attention and I got to thinking I wasn't too.

"I knew my Grandma was almost totally deaf but she is 86, then I was at a family party

and my dad and his brothers and sisters were all discussing their varying degrees of hearing loss – that was a weird experience – "pardon?" "eh?" "what was that?" The TV needs to be louder, I can't concentrate on the phone with any background noise and rooms full of people are now very trying."

If you think you are not hearing your colleagues and family as well as before, then it is a good idea to take the hearing check. The same applies to family members or friends, although you may have to broach the subject of hearing loss sensitively.

The thought of losing one's hearing can be scary and it is possible that they are not ready to accept that this may be happening.

RNID is the largest charity working to change the world for deaf and hard of hearing people and offers a wealth of information and support. For more information: www.rnid.org.uk

Always sympathetic

Thank you for all your efforts with regards to my successful court case.

It's been a stressful three years and no amount of money will make up for the consequences of my injury, but I now feel I can bring closure to this unfortunate period of my life.

At all times you've been sympathetic to my situation, dealing with my many enquiries with patience and concern. I'm fully satisfied with the compensation level achieved, which hopefully will make amends for any future losses.

Once again, many thanks
Brian Nuttall, GMC

Your expert advice

Thanks for all your work regarding the litigation of Lancashire Fire Service on my behalf.

You would not believe how different I feel now that it's all over. It's like a massive weight has been removed and I'm now starting to chill out, which is something I haven't been able to do for over three years.

Not having to go through the day in court and the uncertainty of an unresponsive judge, or not, is worth its weight in gold.

Now I'm not getting any harassment from work anymore I feel really positive and relaxed, which was brought about by your expert advice.

Paul James, Lancashire

Hard work and support

Regardless of the outcome of the pending employment tribunal decision, I wish to register my gratitude and sincerest thanks to



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

Seeking justice single-mindedly

My protracted and complex claim for personal injury was recently concluded.

Throughout the time it took to settle this matter the Fire Brigades Union were wholly supportive and single-minded in seeking justice for me and I would like to record my gratitude.

When I look back to over 30 years I see labour rights considerably weakened and security at work diminished.

This confirms the continuing need for strong and united trade unions which can represent and support their members effectively.

The Fire Brigades Union is at the forefront of the struggle for workers rights both at home and internationally and I'm proud of my time as an active member and my continuing association.
Peter MacFarlane, North Wales

Successful claim

Thank you for all your effort and co-operation in succeeding in my claim against my employers for the injury I sustained at work.

Jami Jennings, North Wales

→ Write in with your legal problem to legalbeagle@fbu.org.uk and those of widest relevance to FBU members in the workplace will be selected and answered in future editions. Please include your name, brigade and membership number/full address. With thanks to Thompsons solicitors.

Legal Eagles

The Union and its solicitors, Thompsons, provide action as well as answers when legal problems loom ... as these members can testify

all the staff at Thompsons who have been involved in this case for their hard work and support.

I do understand the amount of work that goes into these sorts of cases and the pressure of expectation from the FBU membership that you must get as a result.

You have been honest with me on the chances of success and although you felt it may

be an uphill battle nevertheless took on the case. I am thankful for that as it allows me the opportunity to have my day in court and by having a tribunal decide the issues will help me come to terms with the loss of my job.

I can rest knowing we put up the best case and the outcome will be what it is.
Steve Williams, Cheshire

‘It’s the most popular sport in Britain’

Rob Oliver seems a mild-mannered, personable sort of bloke. So it comes as a bit of a shock to learn that as Robbie “The Flame” Oliver he has held the title of Cagerage British Welterweight Champion since September 2006, when six million people watched him win on Sky TV.

Mixed Martial Arts – also known as MMA – may be controversial, but on American pay-to-view channels it has outstripped boxing. And in Britain it’s starting to take off big time, fighting its way from the margins to the mainstream.

Last month, the Cagerage Extreme event at Wembley Arena was a sell-out, with 12,000 punters paying to see what has been dubbed “ultimate fighting”. Women, or “babes” as they were billed, were cage fighting in the UK for the first time at a mainstream venue, inevitably attracting media coverage. The British Medical Association repeated its call for a ban on any kind of boxing.

Rob, 29, a fighter and a fan since the early days, says MMA is now the most popular sport in Britain. It takes elements from martial arts such as Thai kickboxing, Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and freestyle wrestling, fuses them together in a form that promotes rigorous physical combat and attracts large audiences.

It is a genuine sport that people train hard for and deserves to be taken seriously, Rob argues. It can even trace its roots back to Ancient Greece. He would love to see it as an Olympic sport, but acknowledges the rules would have to be overhauled.

This heady cocktail of combat sports and disciplines





ROB OLIVER

Rob Oliver, 29, combines working as a firefighter in Cambridge with the Welterweight Cagefighting championship of Britain

'People are out there training for up to six hours a day who take their sport very seriously'

takes place in what Rob prefers to call a "fenced arena" rather than a cage.

It is, he says, a much safer environment for a contact sport that combines the striking and wrestling arts with ground fighting.

The language in MMA language is ramped-up and turbocharged and flouts political correctness on all fronts. While The Ground Fighter seeks "mission submission", The Wrestler could opt for the "ground'n'pound" approach, while the Striker may well use "sprawl and brawl" tactics in his quest for victory. This mix of fighting styles means combatants have to think on their feet – or on the ground if that's where the contest takes them.

As Rob puts it: "In mixed martial arts, I might be fighting someone who doesn't want to punch me at all, they want to put me in an arm lock or get me in a stranglehold".

As featherweight champion, Rob usually has to lose around 12 kilos before a fight weigh-in to get down to 66 kilos, re-hydrating himself before the fight begins. Boxers and other athletes do the same.

Every day of the week

Rob trains every day of the week, starting off with fitness training including circuit training first thing in the morning. Then, four of five nights a week, he'll "concentrate on the technical side" of his chosen sport, practicing wrestling drills and perhaps trying out a few arm longs and strangles. "I love boxing, I love wrestling, I love contact sports. Mixed Martial arts gives you incredible range," he says. I see myself as a bit of a performer when I'm out there in front of a lot of people. There's nothing like it".

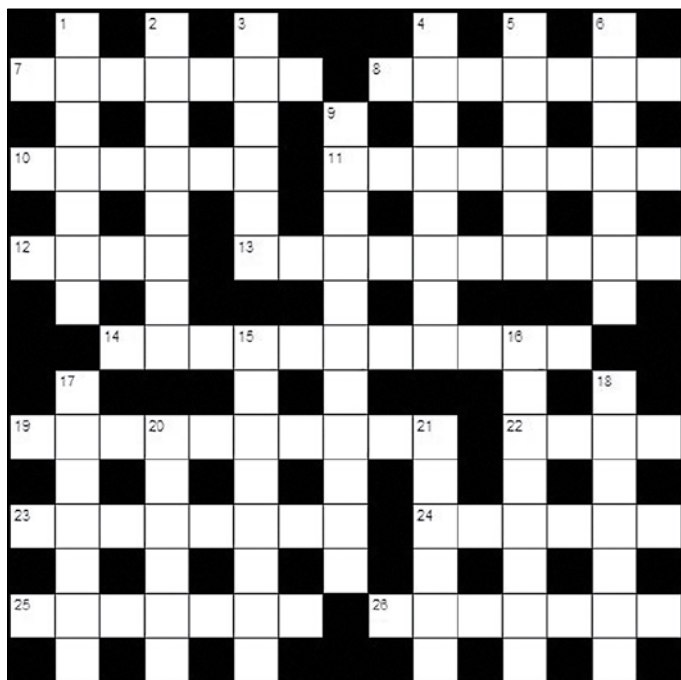
As MMA is an intensely physically demanding activity, Rob knows he won't be able to carry on at the top of his game for too many years - though he cites a champion in the US who is still competing at 43. "Realistically", he says "I see myself fighting at top level for the next five years, but I hope I can go on to train and manage others".

Given all this, it is not surprising that Rob is keen to counter the view that MMA is "a barbaric fight in a closed space where two people enter and one person leaves, though it has been promoted as that." Neither is it, he adds, "just a couple of thugs getting into their swinging windmills. There are people out there training for up to six hours a day who take their sport very seriously.

Rob believes quite a few UK firefighters are already involved in MMA and would like to link up with them with a view to getting recognition for it within the fire-fighting sports calendar. "It's the fastest growing sport in the world. It's brilliant and exciting and I want to do everything I can to promote it," he says.

→ www.shootersmma.com

Quick Crossword

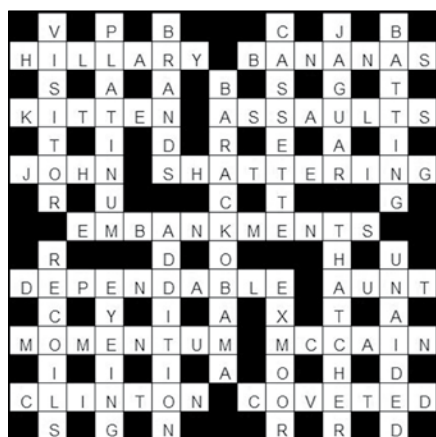


ACROSS

- 7 Provide (contents of house) (7)
 8 Ken, former FBU general secretary (7)
 10 Mode of swimming; sporting shot; sudden disabling attack of illness (6)
 11 Most weighty (8)
 12 Neither terraced nor detached, in short (4)
 13 They have just voted against Musharraf's party (10)
 14 Less formal written messages (11)
 19 Natives of Caribbean island (10)
 22 Long Highland dagger (4)
 23 Most hirsute (8)
 24 Vegetables; political party (6)
 25 You'll have seen these before! (7)
 26 Sideways thinking? (7)

DOWN

- 1 Sarnies (7)
 2 Do this to beat the boss (8)
 3 Not awake (6)
 4 Badgered; bothered; tormented (8)
 5 Light-sensitive layer at the back of the eyeball (6)
 6 It's above the subsoil! (7)
 9 Shami, director of human-rights group Liberty (11)
 15 Bits and bobs (8)
 16 Dmitri, Putin's chosen successor (8)
 17 Musical film, starring Liza Minnelli (7)
 18, 20 General secretary of TUC (7, 6)
 21 Don't go through a red one! (6)



Solution
to March
crossword

Answers to
March 2008
FF quiz

- Barcelona
- Frankie Dettori
- Yachting
- Le Mans
- Two under par
- John McEnroe

Winner of the
January/February
quiz was
Iain MacDonald of
Orkney

PA PHOTOS



Prize Quiz

Win a Radsail Pro III 3m power kite and traction board

Enter our prize quiz and it could be yours.
The theme this month is music.

1. Who won British Female Solo Artist in the 2008 Brit awards?

2. Robbie Williams started his career in which boy band?

3. Who was the lead singer in 'The Jam' and 'Style Council'?

4. Name the Elvis Presley

song that a famous sporting brand used in an advert featuring Eric Cantona and a lot of other famous footballers

5. Which hell-raising actor sang 'MacArthur Park'?

6. Motown Records was originally based in what car manufacturing US city?



PA PHOTOS



HOW TO ENTER

To win the power kite and board please send your answers to the Prize Quiz by 30 April 2008 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (April 2008) FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.



StationCat

... brings you the news they don't want you to hear



JOHN HARRIS/REPORTING.CO.UK

McBurp



It must be a real struggle being a senior fire service player in McGuirkeyside if the declaration of hospitality and gifts which has been passed through the Catflap is anything to go by.

The real drag is trying to keep your weight down with all the dinners, lunches, hampers and drinks that get thrown at you.

I don't know where Tony puts it all. If it's not dinner at Knowsley Hall, accompanied by his wife it's pre-match dinner and the rugby for Sale v Wasps.

But it's Xmas when it all really hits with bottles of wine as gifts from ICE, a wine and chutney gift box from Risksmart, wine from Firesmart, and the Xmas hampers from ICE and then the meals and drinks provided by O2.

DCFO Hagen is in the same boat. But at least he managed to work some of it off with the hospitality provided by 02 Airwave at The Open at Hoylake and watching a Rugby League game. **I hope he had the time to stretch his legs getting around the course and at half time.**

For the top team it appears to be a round

of visits to the Boat show, events at the Liverpool Echo Arena, racing at Aintree and Haydock. But the list might help clear up the question of what Tony had in this glass (above) on 23 October 2006.

The list has Weightman's solicitors down as buying a bottle of champagne at a legal seminar on that day. No doubt to toast the end of the strike.

Time machine



The McGuirkeyside hospitality and gift list has Alan Penton down for a men's watch valued at £80 to £100 provided by Prospects 2000+ on 6 December 2007. Alan has now made his way up to Tayside in a senior role.

I just know that my friends on Tayside won't keep asking him the time. He'll catch on. **Don't do it. Really. Don't.**

Money, money, money



The FireControl project just goes from strength to strength. The Full and Final Business Case is now even further delayed (expect it late summer).

It is so badly delayed that seven out of the nine RCC buildings will have been built with rent being paid on them by the time it is published. The two exceptions are East of England and London.

So much for the departmental commitment that no major decision would be made on the project before the final business case confirms savings will be made.

A lot of smoke and mirrors will be needed to bury the fact that over £20 million will be spent on rents and other costs before the RCCs are fully operational.

In fact there is a gulf opening up between the date the rents have become payable and the migration of even the first control, let alone all of them in a region. In the South West this will be £2.7 million, East Mids £2.7 million and North East £2.2 million (a total of £7.6 million for these three alone).

The risk of a delay of more than six months between building completion and becoming operational was identified as far back as the outline business case in November 2004. This warned there was a "very high" risk these costs would fatally undermine the savings claimed for the project.

In true Whitehall fashion they are now throwing money at the project hand over fist. Not only is it being flagged as costing a massive £1.4 billion pounds, my little helpers in the Department indicate alarms are ringing that even that could be surpassed.

Revolver



The DCLoG revolving door that whisks ministers and civil servants in and out of the department continues at speed. Peter Betts, the senior civil servant in charge of the Fire and Resilience Division, has moved onwards and upwards.

Those who had contact with him tell me he was a decent sort of chap. Soon it will be time for the summer reshuffle.

Mr Brown has now had time to see what changes he needs to make before the serious run in to the general election starts. While whetting my whiskers in the Red Lion, opposite Downing Street, one of Mr Brown's helpers suggested to me they were thinking of "unbundling" the responsibilities of the department.

I assured him that would be a terrible waste of a tremendous pool of talent. **My comment caught him mid-sip and he managed to nearly choke on his drink, which does not bode well for DCLoG.**

Backroom



An interesting Parliamentary Question and answer is passed through the Catflap. It shows that in 2000-01 there were 44,694 firefighters and 6,263 non-uniformed staff in the fire service in England.

In 2005-06 the figures show a slight drop in the number of firefighters to 44,635. The shocking figure is the 30% plus growth in non-uniformed staff with the figures showing they have risen to 8,088.

Whatever happened to efficiency savings on backroom operations to spend on frontline services?

The fire service has got it the other way around.

✂ if you have any snippets you think Station Cat should get his sharp claws into email: stationcat@fbu.org.uk

25-year badges



Roger Moore (r) Coventry Fire Safety, receives his 25-year badge from Chris Downes, West Midlands membership secretary



Dave House (r) Hitchin fire station receives his 25-year badge from Stevenage/Hitchin branch chair Jim Bull



Mark Douglas (l) Hornchurch, receives his 25-year badge from regional secretary Joe MacVeigh



Derek Thomson (l) receives his 25-year badge from Ron Costello, brigade chairman, Tayside Fire and Rescue



Steve Smith (r) Red Watch, Bolton North, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep John Hampson



Chris Hopkins (r) Red Watch, Bolton North, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep John Hampson



Dave Smith (centre) Bexhill Fire Station, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Gary Alexander with Max Gilbert (l) East Sussex brigade membership secretary



Steve Marquiss (r) Hitchin Fire Station, receives his 25-year badge from Stevenage/Hitchin branch chair Jim Bull



John Harper (r) Green Watch Bickenhill Fire Station, receives his 25-year badge from Chris Downes, West Midlands membership secretary



Jim Malone, (far left) Tayside FBU brigade secretary, presenting medals to: (l to r) Back Row – Ali McDonald, Jim Smith, John Mowatt; middle row – Ewan Miles, Ronnie Massie, Charlie Kidd; front row – Alan Brown, Kenny Higgins, Eddie Lynch

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Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for **personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.**

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.

T THOMPSONS SOLICITORS

Please send photographic prints or digital picture files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk
Please include FULL DETAILS for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/brigade/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.